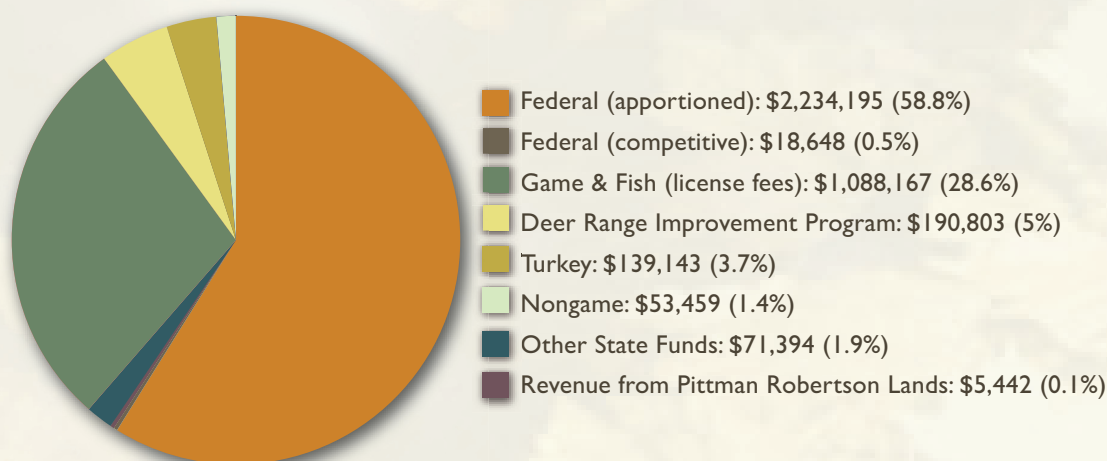
A close-up photograph of a black bear standing in a forest. The bear is facing the camera, with its head slightly lowered. Its fur is dark black, and its eyes are a light brown color. The background is a blurred forest scene with green foliage and brown tree trunks. The text "Species Management and Regulations" is overlaid on the bear's chest in a yellow, serif font.

Species Management and Regulations

Fiscal Year 2010

Species Management & Regulation Expenditures by Fund Source



The Wildlife Division invested:

- 31,000 hours working on species management and regulations;
- 24,256 hours on wildlife population surveys (the Wildlife Division planned to do 256 survey routes and completed 272);
- 3,961 hours banding waterfowl (the Wildlife Division planned to band 5,940 birds and banded only 4,988 due to difficulty finding birds);
- 2,672 hours on wildlife harvest/opinion surveys (the Wildlife Division planned to conduct 11 surveys and accomplished 17 due to additional survey needs arising);
- 1,245 hours on animal relocation;
- 1,171 hours to produce five of the nine hunting information digests;
- 970 hours to maintain 381 wildlife structures (the Wildlife Division planned to maintain 391);
- 899 hours on the Woodcock and Young Forest Initiative;
- 330 hours on the Natural Heritage Program; and
- 220 hours on depredation investigations.

Important considerations for species management include data analysis and evaluation; dissemination of information to wildlife managers, the public, other agencies and decision-makers; and management recommendations based on science and public desires. After the research staff performs the initial analysis, data goes to field managers for further evaluation. In addition to the data collected by formal surveys, field managers employ their extensive knowledge of the specific areas they manage to ensure public opinion, habitat condition and population trends are considered when developing specific management recommendations and alternatives. Management meetings throughout the year bring together professional staff to discuss and further refine data analysis and evaluation. All aspects of the data are examined to ensure a full, objective evaluation.

More details about wildlife population and harvest surveys can be found in the Research and Monitoring section of this report.

Program specialists and field staff also work cooperatively with other agencies to formulate management recommendations for migratory birds and species of special interest, such as the bald eagle and gray wolf. Some of this collaborative work has resulted in development of improved modeling and data analysis, as in the case of the Canada goose. Wildlife Division staff also attends and makes presentations at professional seminars and flyway meetings.

The regulations-setting process is a tiered approach to developing recommendations for the taking of game species in Michigan. The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) is the decision-making body for establishing regulations under Public Act 451. Habitat biologists work closely with local constituent groups and other DNR divisions, and across Wildlife Division management units, to develop annual recommendations for hunting regulations. Regulation recommendations include those related to boundary development (deer, bear and turkey management units), bag limits and license quotas (antlerless deer, bear and turkey), season dates and method of take (e.g. snaring, baiting).

The Wildlife Division takes a yearlong, sometimes multi-year, approach to developing its recommendations for regulations. Internally this process usually includes two major meetings – involving species specialists, research specialists, habitat biologists, unit supervisors and section supervisors – every year during January and February. After DNR approval, the Wildlife Conservation Order (WCO) amendment recommendation is submitted for information to the NRC, the public is given 60 days to provide comment, and then the NRC votes on whether to adopt the recommendation.

During fiscal year 2010, the Wildlife Division recommended 17 changes to the Wildlife Conservation Order through the Natural Resources Commission regulations-setting process:

- 1) Supplemental feeding of deer
- 2) Resident Canada goose management
- 3) Tracking legally shot game animals
- 4) Hunt drawing success notification and turkey license technical amendment
- 5) Bear license quotas and regulations
- 6) Elk license quotas and regulations
- 7) Deer hunting regulations – areas open in early and late antlerless seasons
- 8) Fall turkey license quotas and regulations
- 9) Sharp-tailed grouse and coyote hunting seasons
- 10) Deer hunting regulations – areas open/closed for antlerless deer licenses, antler point restrictions in Deer Management Unit 487, extended youth season
- 11) Managed waterfowl area regulations
- 12) Antlerless deer license quotas
- 13) Mitchell State Park open to hunting and trapping
- 14) Supplemental feeding of deer – new locations in Upper Peninsula qualify if snow is deep enough
- 15) Falconry regulations
- 16) Waterfowl and other migratory bird hunting regulations
- 17) Crossbow regulations

Specific Hunting Regulation Changes

Sharp-tailed grouse – One of the biggest changes to hunting regulations in 2010 was the return of a sharp-tailed grouse hunting season in the eastern Upper Peninsula for the first time since 1996. Hunters can pursue sharptails in a small portion of the east end of the U.P. – basically east of I-75 – if they obtain a free sharp-tailed grouse stamp to go along with their small game license.

Deer – As is often the case, the majority of regulation changes affected deer hunting. Crossbows became legal for everyone, regardless of age, during all archery seasons except the December season in the Upper Peninsula. Antler point restrictions similar to those in the Upper Peninsula went into effect in Deer Management Unit 487 (the six-county bovine tuberculosis zone in the northeastern Lower Peninsula) for hunters using a combination license. A buck had to have at least three antler points on one side to be taken with an unrestricted tag and at least four antler points on one side to be taken with a restricted tag. Hunters who chose to purchase archery and/or firearms licenses were restricted to a single legal buck. Meanwhile, firearms or combination license tags could be used to take an antlerless deer in DMU 487 during firearms or muzzleloader seasons. These new regulations were implemented in DMU 487 to shift a portion of deer harvest from bucks to does in an effort to jump-start stalled progress on further reducing tuberculosis prevalence in deer. Finally, an early, antlerless-only youth season was established on private land in southern Michigan, DMU 041 and DMU 486, from Sept. 21 to 24.

Turkey – To expand wild turkey hunting opportunities in the state, all of the Upper Peninsula was opened for spring and fall turkey hunting, and fall turkey hunters were allowed to purchase multiple licenses – one per day until quotas were met.

Feral swine – Hunters were allowed to take feral hogs on private property (with permission) or public property all year with any valid hunting license or concealed weapons permit.

Commercial hunting guides – All commercial hunting guides who used state-owned lands were required to obtain a free use permit.

Species Program Highlights

Deer and Elk Program

The Deer and Elk Program's focus in 2010 was on Michigan's first-ever statewide deer management plan, which involved holding eight public meetings around the state in February and March 2010.

The Wildlife Division also began working on a similar elk management plan, which will be completed in 2011, including the formation of an Elk Management Advisory Team made up of a diverse group of stakeholders. Seasonal staff was hired to assist northeastern Lower Peninsula landowners experiencing conflicts with elk by providing consultation on damage mitigation methods and how to encourage elk to move to areas with less likelihood of conflict.

The Wildlife Division worked with Michigan State University on a variety of collaborative projects, ranging from evaluating the elk advisory team process and assessing the impacts of increasing numbers of deer management cooperatives to developing a new website to provide up-to-date deer management content and experimenting with using Twitter to deliver information on deer hunting conditions and experiences.

Much attention was focused on regulation changes such as the new buck-tag rules for the bovine tuberculosis zone in DMU 487 and liberalization of crossbow usage during archery season.

One of the Deer and Elk Program's other big-picture projects was the development of Regional Deer Advisory Teams, a process that is expected to come to fruition in 2011.

Upland Game Bird Program

Changes to hunting regulations for several upland game bird species in 2010 included reinstituting a sharp-tailed grouse season in Michigan for the first time since 1996. Sharp-tailed grouse are found in the eastern end of the Upper Peninsula. The season was closed in 1996 after the spring lek survey (a lek is an area where male animals gather to perform courtship displays) showed decreasing numbers of birds. However, new survey techniques found that the birds were less faithful to their traditional breeding territories than once thought, and Wildlife Division staffers concluded that sharptail populations were likely much larger than the old survey technique indicated. As a result, the NRC set a season running from Oct. 10-31 with a daily bag limit of two, a possession limit of four and a season limit of six.

A new regulation resulted in expanded turkey opportunities for the 2010 fall season. The entire Upper Peninsula was incorporated into a single management unit, and hunters were allowed to purchase multiple licenses over the counter in the fall. In addition, the Wildlife Division worked in partnership with the Michigan chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation to grow 5,000 fruit-producing crabapple trees. The trees, being grown in pots at the Rose Lake Wildlife Research Area, will be transplanted to game and wildlife areas around the state to provide food sources and habitat for wild turkey. Michigan ranks sixth in the nation for turkey harvest.

Among its accomplishments in FY 2010, Upland Game Bird Program staff helped create the Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative, a collaborative conservation initiative bringing together a diverse group of partners to facilitate a revitalization of Michigan pheasants. The Wildlife Division also participated in national pheasant planning efforts, while focusing on improving Michigan's pheasant habitat and working with Pheasants Forever on establishing food and cover plots.

As part of its work on grouse habitat, emphasizing aspen and alders, the division helped make the Ruffed Grouse Society's forest habitat hydro-ax available for both private and public lands.

The Upland Game Bird Program staff worked to obtain federal grants for Michigan as part of the nationwide Woodcock and Young Forest Initiative, helped monitor woodcock populations nationally and continued to oversee the state's volunteer woodcock banding program.

Waterfowl/Wetlands Program

A good portion of 2010 was spent writing grant proposals that resulted in more than \$2.75 million for Michigan habitat projects. Of that, \$1.8 million is through a collaboration with Ducks Unlimited for habitat projects located on Wildlife Division lands. The division received two Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: \$590,000 to repair floodgates and control invasive species at Shiawassee River State Game Area in Saginaw County and \$465,000 for dike repairs at Pointe Mouillee State Game Area in Monroe and Wayne counties.

The Wildlife Division participated in setting waterfowl regulations regionally as part of the Mississippi Flyway Council Technical Section. Michigan waterfowl hunters once again enjoyed a liberal waterfowl hunting season under federal frameworks, including full pintail, canvasback and scaup seasons and an increase in the daily bag limit for pintails from one to two. The Wildlife Division and the Citizens Waterfowl Advisory Committee (CWAC) again agreed on a joint management recommendation for waterfowl hunting seasons. With CWAC support, the division also issued a three-year moratorium on the use of spinning-wing decoys at Shiawassee River State Game Area to enhance hunting experiences. The Waterfowl/Wetlands Program also helped monitor

waterfowl populations nationally through several waterfowl surveys.

In 2010, the division modified the policy for resolving human/goose conflicts by expanding the number of sites eligible for Canada goose nest and egg destruction and moving the DNR out of trap-and-transfer operations. The new policy makes outside contractors responsible for relocating geese; contractors will pay a permit fee to help recoup the Wildlife Division's costs. Individual sites also must now pay a fee for permits to round up geese. The revenue from these fees almost entirely covered the cost of the division's administration of this program. Historically, hunter dollars paid 100 percent of the Resident Canada Goose Program. Revision of this policy included multiple meetings with the division's Resident Canada Goose Work Group, private goose contractors and the Goose Coalition.

The Wildlife Division also began revising its Mute Swan Control and Management Policy and Procedures in 2010 by creating a forum made up of agencies, organizations and individuals interested in mute swan management. This group gave the division feedback on improving methods of controlling the greatly expanding and often problematic mute swan. Exotic mute swans are negatively impacting aquatic vegetation, displacing native waterfowl and causing conflicts with humans.

The Waterfowl/Wetlands Program was heavily involved in a work group of the legislatively formed Wetland Advisory Council that included other department divisions, the Michigan Department of Agriculture, Ducks Unlimited, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Service Agency. This group, as well as the Wetland Working Group, provided recommendations on the development of new General Permits and Minor Permits that should streamline permitting for wetland restoration and enhancement activities.

All-Bird Program

The Wildlife Division, as it assumes full authority for permitting falconry activities from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has liberalized regulations. Falconers whose birds take non-target species while hunting will not be subject to citation if they do not take possession of the prey. The minimum age for general falconers has been lowered to 16 from 18. Possession limits for licensed falconers have been liberalized as well. General falconers may now possess up to three birds instead of two, and master falconers may now possess up to 10 birds instead of three, but no more than five of them may be wild-caught raptors. Master falconers may now possess eagles other than bald eagles. The change will allow falconers from other states who have eagles to relocate to Michigan but maintain possession of their birds.

The division has named six licensed falconers as agents of the state to allow them to take merlins from specific locations where the birds are preying on piping plovers. It is anticipated that capture of merlins will begin in 2011. Meanwhile, staff is working with federal authorities to allow the take of migrating peregrine falcons for falconry while the birds pass through the state. The take should not impact Michigan's nesting population, which has been noted at 30 sites – about twice as many as were thought to live in Michigan in pre-settlement times.

An increase in Michigan's double-crested cormorant population in recent years and the resulting damage to fisheries, wildlife and habitat resources prompted the DNR and federal agencies to undertake cormorant management efforts. Fewer cormorants were eliminated in 2010 than in 2009, largely because fewer cormorants stayed in Michigan. The Wildlife Division is helping to update the Environmental Assessment to allow for additional flexibility in cormorant management. Michigan is now home to roughly 18,000 nesting pairs of double-crested cormorants, down from about 30,000 in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Bear/Furbearer Program

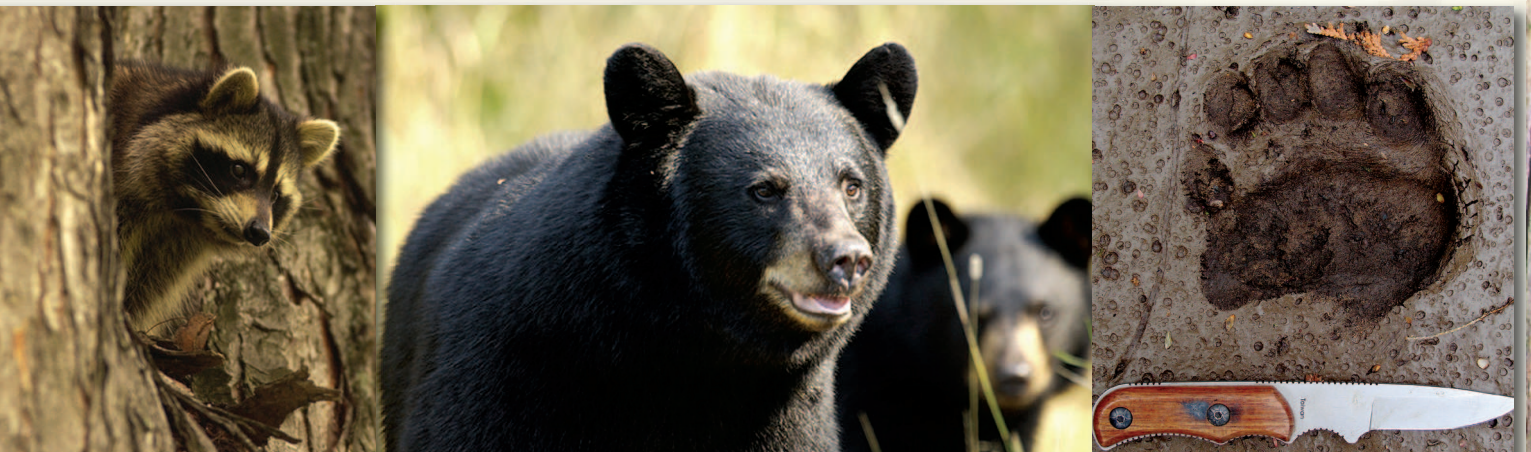
In 2010, bear and furbearer hunting and trapping regulations were almost identical to the previous seasons. Furbearer regulations set in 2009 were designed to last for two seasons, allowing staff a better view of the efficacy of those regulations and more time to formulate alternatives.

The Wildlife Division is working on a bear management communication strategy, which includes the creation of a Bear Management Plan at-a-glance overview booklet. Additional information is available online at www.michigan.gov/bear.

There were no changes in fur-taking regulations for 2010, though there likely will be changes in 2011. The Wildlife Division held a facilitated meeting, involving both trapping and hound organizations, about dry-land cable restraints and agreed to test new cable restraint configurations. Information from this meeting and study will help inform potential cable restraint regulation changes in the future.

Both stakeholders and Wildlife Division staff have concerns about declines in marten and fisher populations. The division is evaluating a new method of estimating furbearer populations, using existing data that shows declines in both populations, and will recommend regulation changes designed to reduce the harvest of both species. The division also likely will recommend an increase in the northern Lower Peninsula otter harvest limit. Other items under discussion include possible extension of mink and muskrat seasons, allowing the use of calls to take raccoons and opossums at night and allowing trappers to carry a .22 or smaller rim-fire firearm while checking traps in the Shotgun Zone during the firearms deer season.

The Wildlife Division was able to verify that an animal in a 2010 photo taken by a trail camera in the eastern Upper Peninsula was a cougar, the second confirmed photograph of a cougar in Michigan. Originally native to Michigan, cougars were extirpated from the state around the turn of the century, and since that time there have been periodic reports of cougar sightings in various parts of the state. In most of these cases, the additional types of physical evidence that the DNR relies on to document the presence of cougars – such as carcasses and verified photos and tracks – have not been found.



Pictured from left to right: raccoon; black bear; black bear track